LIFE OR DEATH.

BY THE LATE HUGH CONWAY.

Author of "Called Back," "Dark Days," "A Family Affair," Etc.

CHAPTER I.

After you pass the "Blue Anchor," the sign of which swings from the branch of an elm tree older even than the house itself, a few steps along the road bring you in sight of the pinnacled, square tower of Coombe-Acton church. You cannot see the church itself, as, with schools and rectory close by it, it lies at the back of the village, about two hundred yards up a lane. Like the village to whose spiritual needs it ministers, the church, to an ordinary observer, is nothing out of the common, although certain small peculiarities of architecture, not noticed by an uncultured eye, make it an object of some interest to archæologists. Visit it or not, according to your inclination, but afterwards keep straight on through the long, straggling village, until the houses begin to grow even more straggling, the gardens larger and less cared for as ornaments, displaying more cabbages and scarlet runners than roses—keep on until the houses cease altogether, and hawthorn hedges take the place of palings and crumbling walls, and at last you will come to Watercress Farm, a long, low, white house, one side of which abuts on the highway, while the other looks over the three hundred acres of land attached to it.

Not a very large acreage, it is true, but then it is all good land, for the most part such as auctioneers describe as rich, warm, deep, old pasture land; such land that, at the time this tale opens, any farmer, by thrift, knowledge of his business and hard work, could make even more than bare living out of, and could meet his landlord on rent day with a cheerful face, knowing that after rent and other outgoings were provided for something would yet be left for himself.

Who occupies Watercress Farm now, and whether in these days of depression his rent is readily forthcoming or not matters little. At the time I write of it was rented by Farmer Leigh, even as his forefathers, according to village tradition, had rented it for some two hundred years. In quiet, conservative places like Coombe-Acton, a farm of this kind often goes from father to son with more regularity than an entailed estate, landlord and tenant well knowing that their interests are identical.

FARMER LEIGH.

It was a fine afternoon toward the end of June. Abraham Leigh was standing by the gate of the field known as the home meadow, looking at the long rye grass rippling as the summer breeze swept across it. He was a thoroughly good specimen of a Somersetshire farmer. A big, sturdy man, whose movements were slow and deliberate. His face, if heavy and stolid, not by any means the face of a fool. No doubt a man of circumscribed views—the world, for him, extending eastward to the Bristol channel. Nevertheless, respected in his little world as a wonderful judge of a beast, a great authority on tillages, and, above all, a man who always had a balance in his favor at the Somersetshire bank; a type of that extinct race, the prosperous farmer, who looked on all townsmen with contempt, thinking, as all farmers should think, that the owners of broad acres, and those engaged in agriculture, were alone worthy of respect.

Yes, to-day, in spite of his advantages and acquirements, Farmer Leigh looked on the fifteen-acre meadow with a puzzled and discontented expression on his honest face; and, moreover, murmurs of dissatisfaction were proceeding from his lips. Farmers—Somersetshire farmers especially—are proverbial grumblers, but it is seldom they grumble without an audience. It is outsiders who get the benefit of their complaints. Besides, one would think that the tenant of Watercress Farm had little, at present, to complain of. The drop of rain so badly wanted had been long in coming, but it had come just in the nick of time to save the grass, and if the crop, outwardly, looked a little thin, Mr. Leigh's experienced eye told him that the undergrowth was thick and that the quality of the hay would be first-class. Moreover, what corn and roots he had looked promising, so it seems strange that this farmer should be grumbling when he had no one to listen to him, and should lean so disconsolately upon the gate of the field when no one observed him.

"I can't make him out," he said. "Good boy he be, too—yet instead o' helping me with the land, always going about dreaming or messing with mud. Can't think where he got his notions from. Suppose it must 'a been from the mother, poor thing! Always fond o' gimcracks and such like, she were. Gave the lad such an outlandish name. I'm ashamed to hear it. Father's and grandfather's name ought to be good enough for a Leigh—good boy, though, he be, too!"

A soft look settled on Abraham Leigh's face as he repeated the last words; then he went deeper into his slough of despond, where, no doubt, he battled as manfully as a Christian, until he reached the other shore, and fancied he had found the solution of his difficulties.

His face brightened. "Tell 'ee what," he said, addressing the waving grass in front of him, "I'll ask Mr. Herbert. Squire's a man who have seen the world. I'll take his advice about the boy. Seems hard like on me, too. No'er a Leigh till this one but what were a farmer to the backbone!"

His mind made up, the farmer strode off to make arrangements with mowers. Had he been troubled with twenty unnatural and incompetent sons, the hay must be made while the sun shines.

Although he had settled what to do, it was some time before the weighty resolve was carried into execution. Folks about Coombe-Acton do not move with the celerity of cotton brokers or other men of business. Sure they are, but slow. So it was not until the September rent day that the farmer consulted his landlord about his domestic difficulty—the possession of a son, an only child, of about 15, who instead of making himself useful on the land, did little else save wander about in a dreamy way, looking at all objects in nature, animate or inanimate, or employed himself in the mysterious pursuit which his father described as "messing with mud." Such conduct was a departure from the respectable bucolic traditions of the Leigh family so great that at times the father thought it an infliction laid upon him for some cause or other by an inscrutable Providence.

There are certain Spanish noblemen who, on account of the antiquity of their families and services rendered, are permitted to enter the royal presence with covered heads. It was, perhaps, for somewhat similar reasons, a custom handed down from father to son and established by time, that the tenant of Watercress Farm paid his rent to the landlord in person, not through the medium of an agent. Mr. Herbert being an important man in the west country, the Leigh family valued this privilege as highly as ever hidalgo valued the one above mentioned. Mr. Herbert, a refined, intellectual looking man of about 50, received the farmer kindly, and, after the rent, without a word as to abatement or reduction, had been paid in notes of the county bank—dark and greasy, but valued in this particular district far above Bank of England promises—landlord and tenant settled down to a few minutes' conversation on crops and kindred subjects. Then the farmer unburdened his mind.

"I've come to ask the favor of your advice, sir, about my boy, Jerry."

"Yes," said Mr. Herbert, "I know him, a nice, good-looking boy. I see him at church with you and about your place when I pass. What of him?"

"Well, you see, zur," said the farmer, speaking with more Somerset dialect than usual, "he've a been at Bristol grammar school till just now. Masters all sends good accounts of him. I don't hold wi' too much learning, so thought 'twer time he come home and helped me like. But not a bit o' good he be on the varm; not a bit, zur! Spends near all his time messing about wi' dirt."

"Doing what?" asked Mr. Herbert, astonished.

"A-muddling and a-messing with bits o' clay. Making little figgers like, and tries to bake 'em in the oven."

"Oh, I see what you mean. What sort of figures?"

"All sorts, sir. Little clay figgers of horses, dogs, pigs—why, you'd scarce believe it, sir—last week I found him making the figger of a naked 'ooman! A naked 'ooman! Why, the lad could never 'a' seen such a thing."

Abraham Leigh waited with open eyes to hear Mr. Herbert's opinion of such an extraordinary, if not positively unusual proceeding.

Mr. Herbert smiled.

"Perhaps your son is a youthful genius."

"Genius or not, I want to know, sir, what to do wi' him. How's the boy to make a living? A farmer he'll never be."

"You follow me and I will show you something."

Mr. Herbert led his guest to his drawing-room—a room furnished with the taste of a traveled man. As the farmer gaped at its splendor he directed his attention to the four beautiful statues standing in the corners of the room.

"I gave the man who made those £700 for them, and could sell them to-morrow for £1,000 if I choose. That's almost as good as farming, isn't it?"

His tenant's eyes were wide with amazement. "A thousand pounds, sir!" he gasped. "Why, you might have bought that fourteen acre field with that."

"These give me more pleasure than land," replied Mr. Herbert. "But about your boy—when I am riding by I will look in and see what he can do; then give you my advice."

The farmer thanked him and returned home. As he jogged along the road to Watercress Farm he muttered at intervals: "Well, well, I never did!"

Mr. Herbert was a man who kept a promise, whether made to high or low. Five days after his interview with Abraham Leigh he rode up to the door of the farm. He was not alone. By his side rode a gay, laughing, light-haired child of 13, who ruled an indulgent father with a rod of iron. Mr. Herbert had been a widower for some years; the girl and a boy who was just leaving Harrow for the university being his only surviving children. The boy was perhaps all that Mr. Herbert might have wished, but he could see no fault in the precocious, imperious, spoiled little maid, who was the sunshine of his life.

She tripped lightly after her father into the farmhouse, laughing at the way in which he was obliged to bend his head to avoid damages from the low doorway; she seated herself with becoming dignity on the chair which the widowed sister who kept house for Abraham Leigh tendered her with many courtesies. A pretty child, indeed, and one who gave rare promise of growing into a lovely woman.

The farmer was away somewhere on the farm, but could be fetched in a minute if Mr. Herbert would wait. Mr. Herbert waited, and very soon his tenant made his appearance and thanked his visitor for the trouble he was taking on his behalf.

"Now let me see the boy," said Mr. Herbert, after disclaiming all sense of trouble.

Leigh went to the door of the room and shouted out, "Jerry, Jerry, come down. You're wanted, my man."

In a moment the door opened, and the cause of Mr. Leigh's discontent came upon the scene in the form of a dark-eyed, dark-haired, pale-faced boy, tall but slightly built, not, so far as physique went, much credit to the country side; yet in some respects a striking looking, if not a handsome lad. The dark, eloquent eyes and strongly marked brow would arrest attention; but the face was too thin, too thoughtful for the age, and could scarcely be associated with what commonly constitutes a good-looking lad. Yet, regularity of feature was there, and no one would dare to be sure that beauty would not come with manhood.

He was not seen at that moment under advantageous circumstances. Knowing nothing about the distinguished visitors, he had obeyed his father's summons in hot haste, consequently he entered the room in his shirtsleeves, which were certainly not very clean, and with hands covered with red clay. Mr. Herbert looked amused, while the little princess turned up her nose in great disdain.

Poor Abraham Leigh was much mystified at the unpresentable state in which his son showed himself. To make matters worse, the boy was not soiled by honest, legitimate toil.

"Tut, tut!" he said, crossly. "All of a muck as usual."

The boy, who felt that his father had a right to complain, hung his head and showed signs of retreating. Mr. Herbert came to the rescue.

"Never mind," he said, patting young Leigh on the shoulder, "he has been working in his own fashion. I have come on purpose to see those modelings of yours, my boy."

The boy started as one surprised. His cheek flushed and he looked at the speaker with incredulity yet hope in his eyes.

"Yes," said the father sharply. "Go and put your hands under the pump, Jerry, then bring some of 'em down. Mabbe, any way, they'll amuse the little lady."

"No, no," said Mr. Herbert. "I'll come with you and see them for myself. Lead the way."

Young Leigh did not speak, but his eyes thanked Mr. Herbert. That gentleman followed him from the room, leaving the farmer to amuse the little maid. He did this so far as he was able by producing a well-thumbed copy of the "Pilgrim's Progress," the leaves of which Miss Herbert condescended to turn daintily over until she was quite terrified by the picture of the combat with Apolyon.

Meanwhile, "Jerry," with a beating heart, led Mr. Herbert up stairs to a room destitute of furniture, save an old table and chair. A bucket half full of common red clay stood in one corner, and on the table were several of the little clay figures which had excited the farmer's ire and consternation.

Crude, defective, full of faults as they were, there was enough power in them to make Mr. Herbert look at the lad in wonderment, almost envy. He was a man who worshipped art; who had dabbled as an amateur in painting and sculpturing for years; who considered a gifted artist the most fortunate of mankind. So the word envy is not ill chosen. What he would have given half his wealth to possess came to this boy unsought for—to the son of a clod of a farmer the precious gift was vouchsafed!

As he would have expected, the most ambitious efforts were the worst—the "naked 'ooman" was particularly atrocious—but, still wet, and not ruined by an abortive attempt at taking, was a group modeled from life, a vulgar subject, representing, as it did, Abraham Leigh's prize sow, surrounded by her ten greedy offspring. There was such a power and talent in this production that, had he seen nothing else, Mr. Herbert would have been certain that the lad as a modeler and copyist must take the first rank. If, in addition to his manual dexterity, he had poetry, feeling and imagination, it might well be that one of the greatest sculptors of the nineteenth century stood in embryo before him.

As Mr. Herbert glanced from the rough clay sketches to the pale boy who stood breathless, as one expecting a verdict of life or death, he wondered what could have been the cause of such a divergence from the traits habitual to the Leighs. Then he remembered that some twenty years ago Abraham Leigh had chosen for a wife not one of his own kind, but a dweller in cities—a governess, who exchanged, no doubt, a life of penury and servitude for the rough but comfortable home the Somersetshire farmer was willing to give her. Mr. Herbert remembered her, remembered how utterly out of place the delicate, refined woman seemed to be as Leigh's wife; remembered how, a few years after the birth of the boy, she sickened and died. It was from the mother's side the artistic taste came.

Mr. Herbert, although a kind man, was cautious. He had no intention of raising hopes which might be futile. Yet he felt a word of encouragement was due to the lad.

"Some of these figures show decided talent," he said. "After seeing them, I need scarcely ask you if you wish to be a sculptor!"

Young Leigh clasped his hands together.

"Oh, sir!" he gasped. "If it could only be!"

"You do not care to be a farmer, like your father?"

"I could never be a farmer, sir. I am not fit for it."

"Yet, if you follow in your father's track, you will lead a comfortable, useful life. If you follow art you may go through years of poverty and suffering before success is attained."

The boy raised his head and looked full at the speaker—there was almost passionate entreaty in his eyes.

"Oh, sir," he said, "if you would only persuade my father to let me try—even for a few years. If I did not succeed I would come back to him and work as a laborer for the rest of my life without a murmur."

Mr. Herbert was impressed by the boy's earnestness. "I will speak to your father," he said. Then the two went back to the sitting-room, where they found Abraham Leigh much exercised by some difficult questions propounded by Miss Herbert respecting the nature of Apolyon.

"Take my little girl for a walk round the garden," said Mr. Herbert to young Leigh. "I want to speak to your father."

In spite of the great gulf between her and the clay-bespattered boy in his shirt sleeves the little princess was too glad of a change of scene to wish to disobey her father. She followed her conductor to the back of the house and the boy and girl stepped out into the autumnal sunshine.

The little maid looked so trim and dainty in her neat riding habit, coquettish hat and tiny gloves, that his own draggled appearance struck the boy forcibly.

"If you will excuse me a minute," he said, "I will run and wash my hands."

"Yes. I think it will be better," said Miss Herbert, with dignity.

In a minute or two young Leigh returned. He had found time not only to wash the rich red clay from his long, well-shaped fingers, but to slip on his coat and generally beautify himself. His improved appearance had a great effect upon the child, who, like most of her age, was influenced by exteriors.

So Miss Herbert, this little great lady, unbent, and allowed "Jerry" to lead her round the old-fashioned garden, to the outhouses and pigstyes, where the obese pigs lay oblivious of what fate had in store for them; to the dairy, where she condescended to drink a glass of new milk, and by the time they had returned to the garden the two were as good friends as their different stations in life would permit. Young Leigh, who saw in this dainty little maid the incarnation of fairies, nymphs, goddesses and other ideals which, in a dim way, were forming themselves in his brain, endeavored, after his first shyness had passed away, to show her what beautiful shapes and forms could be found in flower, leaf and tree, and other things in nature. His talk, indeed, soared far above her pretty little head, and when they returned to the garden he was trying to make her see that those masses of white clouds low down in the distance were two bodies of warriors about to meet in deadly fray.

"You are a very, very funny boy," said Miss Herbert, with such an air of conviction that he was startled into silence.

"Your name is Jerry, isn't it?" she continued. "Jerry's an ugly name."

"My name is Gerald—Gerald Leigh."

"Oh—Gerald." Even this child could see the impropriety of a tenant farmer having a son named Gerald. No wonder Abraham Leigh addressed his boy as Jerry.

"Do you like being a farmer?" she asked.

"I am not going to be a farmer—I don't like it."

"What a pity. Farmers are such a worthy, respectable class of men," said the girl, using a stock phrase she had caught up somewhere.

The boy laughed merrily. Mr. Herbert's approbation sat newly upon him, and he was only talking to a child—so he said,

"I hope to be worthy and respectable, but a much greater man than a farmer."

"Oh! How great!—as great as papa?"

"Yes, I hope so."

"That's absurd, you know," said Miss Herbert, with all the outraged family pride that thirteen years can feel, and, turning away, she switched at the flowers with her riding whip.

However, a few words from Gerald made them friends once more, and she expressed her pleasure that he should pick her one of the few roses which remained in the garden.

"Roses are common," said the boy. "Every one gives roses. I will give you something prettier."

He went to the sunny side of the house and soon returned with half a dozen pale lavender stars in his hands. They were blossoms of a new sort of late clematis, which some one's gardener had given Abraham Leigh. Gerald's deft fingers arranged them into a most artistic bouquet, the appearance of which was entirely spoiled by Miss Herbert's insistance that two or three roses should be added. The bouquet was just finished and presented when Mr. Herbert, followed by the farmer, appeared.

Although he said nothing more to young Leigh on the subject which was uppermost in the boy's mind, the kindly encouraging look he gave him raised the wildest hopes in his heart. Mr. Herbert bade the father and son a pleasant good day and rode off with his little daughter.

Miss Herbert carried the bunch of clematis for about two miles, then, finding it rather incumbered her, tossed it over a hedge.

Gerald Leigh went back to his attic and commenced about half a dozen clay sketches of the prettiest object which as yet had crossed his path. For several days he was

Gerald Leigh went back to his attic.

on thorns to hear what fate had in store for him, but Fate, personified by his father, made no sign, but went about his work stolid and Sphinx-like. Mr. Herbert, Gerald learned, had gone to London for a few days.

However, before a fortnight had gone by, Abraham Leigh received a letter from his landlord, and the same evening, while smoking his pipe in the kitchen, informed his son and his sister that to-morrow he was going into Gloucestershire to see if his brother Joseph could spare him one of his many boys to take Jerry's place. Jerry was to go to London the next day and meet Mr. Herbert. Most likely he'd stay there. 'Twas clear as noontide the boy would never make a farmer, and if there were fools enough in the world to buy white figures at hundreds of pounds apiece, Jerry might as well try to make his living that way as any other.

The truth is, Mr. Herbert told Abraham Leigh that if he would not consent to pay for his son's art education, he, Mr. Herbert, would bear the expense himself. But the monetary part of it troubled the substantial farmer little. He could pay for his child's keeping if he could bring his mind to consent to his going. And now the consent was given.

Gerald heard his father's communication with glowing eyes. For shame's sake he hid his joy, for he knew that, with all his stolid demeanor, his father almost broke down as he contemplated the diverging paths his son and he must henceforward tread. The boy thanked him from his heart, and the rough farmer, laying his hand on the child's head, blessed him and bade him go and prosper.

In this way Gerald Leigh left Coombe-Acton. At long intervals he reappeared for a few days. The worthy villagers eyed him askance, the only conception they could form of his profession being connected with dark-skinned itinerants who bore double tiered platforms on their heads, and earned a precarious livelihood by traversing the country selling conventional representatives of angels and busts of eminent men.

[To be Continued.]

A farmer near Joliet burns the pith out of each ear of seed corn he puts up. He claims that by removing the pith, the corn will dry out in less time and be less liable to injure from hard freezing. He has two irons about one fourth of an inch in diameter, and by keeping one in the fire while using the other, the work is speedily done

Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad.

NEW TIME TABLE.

GOING EAST.

No. 2, Pacific Express and Mail	11.25 A M
" 4, Night Express	3.16 A M
" 6, Kansas City Express	2.30 A M
" 8, Chicago and Davenport Accom.	2.33 P M
" 10, Peru Fast Accommodation	7.02 A M
" 12, St. Paul Express	11.45 A M
Freight's Carrying Passengers.	
" 26,	1.15 P M
" 30,	5.25 P M
" 28,	7.35 A M
" 24,	11.38 P M

GOING WEST.

No. 1, Atlantic Express	3.20 P M
" 3, Night Express	1.10 A M
" 5, Chicago and Kansas City Express	2.12 A M
" 7, Davenport Accommodation	12.40 P M
" 9, Peru Fast Accommodation	8.00 P M
" 11, St. Paul Express, via Albert Lea	2.30 P M
Freights Carrying Passengers.	
" 29,	10.15 A M
" 25,	2.35 P M

Nos. 9 and 10 arrive in Chicago at 10 A. M. and leave Chicago at 4.45 P. M. daily (Sunday excepted).

Nos. 11 and 12 run daily, including Sundays.

No. 22 carries passengers from Rock Island to Ottawa.

No. 26 carries passengers from Geneseo to Ottawa.

No. 25 carries passengers between Geneseo and Ottawa.

No. 29 carries passengers between Joliet and La Salle, and No. 30 between La Salle and Joliet.

Nos. 23 and 28 carry passengers between Blue Island and La Salle.

R. R. CABLE, Gen'l Manager.

E. ST. JOHN, Gen'l Tkt. & Pass Agt.

R. F. PRETTYMAN, Agent at Ottawa.

Chicago, Alton & St. Louis Railroad

On and after April 29, 1884, trains on the C. & A. R. R. pass Joliet as follows:

GOING NORTH.

Express Mail	5.45 P M
Lightning Express	5.45 A M
Denver Express	12.50 P M
K. C. and St. L. Express	5.15 A M
Joliet Accommodation	7.30 A M

GOING SOUTH.

Express Mail	10.15 A M
Lightning Express	10.10 P M
Denver Express	2.00 P M
K. C. and St. L. Express	12.45 A M
Joliet Accommodation	6.45 P M

Lightning Express, Denver Express, and Kansas City and St. Louis Express trains run daily; Express Mail and Joliet Accommodation run daily, except Sunday. Kansas City and St. Louis Express going south runs through without change of cars. Morning train to St. Louis has free chair cars, and evening train through sleepers to St. Louis and Springfield.

JAY W. ADAMS, Ticket Agent C. & A. Railroad.

Chicago, Burlington and Quincy R. R.

TIME TABLE,

October 13th, 1883.

Going South. Pass. No. 71 B.	Going South. Pass. No. 49 B.	Dist. from Aurora.	STATIONS.	Dist. between Stations.	Going North. Pass. No. 70 B.	Going North. Pass. No. 4 B.
P.M. LV	A.M. LV		Chicago		10.30	7.10
4.45	8.45		Aurora		9.12	5.39
6.14	10.23	1	West Aurora	1	9.07	5.34
6.18	10.28	3¾	Fox Riv June	2¾		
6.30	10.39	6¾	Oswego	3	8.54	5.25
6.40	10.53	12¾	Yorkville	6¾	8.42	5.07
6.46	11.00	15¾	Fox	3	8.34	5.00
6.54	11.06	19	Millbrook	3¼	8.26	4.53
7.03	11.13	22½	Millington	3½	8.18	4.45
7.12	11.20	27½	Sheridan	5	8.08	4.34
7.22	11.33	32	Serena	4½	7.58	4.21
		34	Blakes	2		
7.30	11.42	37½	Wedron	3½	7.50	4.15
7.37	11.50	39½	Dayton	4	7.42	4.05
7.50	12.02	44	OTTAWA	4½	7.28	3.50
		44¾	South Ottawa	¾		
		46¾	Side Track	1¾		
8.10	12 20	52¾	Grand Ridge	6¾	7.08	3.30
		56	Richards	3¾		
8.30	12.45	60¾	Streator	4¾	6.50	3.15
P.M. AR	P.M. AR				A.M. LV	P.M. LV

Freight trains carrying passengers leave Ottawa as follows: For Earl, 1.20 P.M.; for Aurora, 10.05 A.M.; for Streator, 5.05 A.M., 5.05 P.M., and 10.05 A.M.

Morning train makes close connection at Aurora for all points east and west.

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PERCIVAL LOWELL, General Passenger Agent, Chicago.

THOS. J. POTTER, General Manager, Chicago.

GEO. E. ROE, Agent at Ottawa.